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## Back Talk-Double Fold or Double Talk

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## Back Talk from page 94

a student and loved using full text journals, I can't wholeheartedly support the idea that digital access in the absence to the originals is bad. Looking at our full text download statistics also convinces me that full text is extremely popular with all users—not just me. Yes, I understand that the OCR technology that is going on behind my searches, and then reading PDF versions of the original pages, is a joke; but such indexing lets me scan so many more articles than I would have otherwise. And I find that I am equally enthusiastic about electronic reference works, monographs, and especially electronic dissertations. But if I didn't have sufficient funds to do both (Columbia does), I would feel justified in buying only digital and hope that the student who wants/needs to use the printed version will be able to borrow it from libraries than can afford to do both or who are anti-digital.

So in the end I enjoyed reading Baker's hyperbolic diatribe in a self flagellating sort of way, although I totally protest/condemn his personal attacks on Pat Battin. She has vision and integrity, rare qualities and rarer to be found in the same person. She is guilty of taking part in promoting the *Slow Fires* hype, but she is not alone in her use of this technique to draw attention to a problem that she feels strongly about. Mr. Baker is equally guilty of this sin as well. He made several points that are worth serious consideration. 

## Desperately Seeking Website from page 92


our online account. It happens every renewal that we lose 2-10 journals, then have to contact the publishers to re-establish access.

**PUB:** *Would you like to see the print and online subscription process even more consolidated so that the subscription agents handle everything from payment of subscriptions to handling of site licenses?*

**LIB:** I hate giving up the authority but relish the idea of time saved. Of course, the ideal would be for you to throw the online access or print in for free. The future of subscription services is a difficult thing to predict. The large publishers could make it economically attractive to deal directly with them. In the short term, yes, I can see the agents doing this for us.

**PUB:** *In what ways do you see the online environment improving for library customers?*

**LIB:** I foresee that in the future the access points will likely be more standardized, in particular in regard to access from various citation indexes. Also I see handheld and wireless technology as potentially having a significant impact upon the future online environment in libraries.

You can ring me at (919) 620-0681 or email me at <amber@jbmr.org> if you would like to add to this discussion or suggest topics to address in future columns. 

## DIVORCE HAPPENS TO LOVE GURUS

by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Megabucks authors Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider promoted *The Rules* as a chronicle of their experiences in snagging the wily male animal. *Rules II* was hot too, and *Rules III*—holding that marriage together through subservience, long hair and low expectations of male sympathy—was due out. Then Fein let it drop to Warner Books that she was about to divorce her husband. And the action had been filed a year earlier ... before she signed the contract. She claims to have kept it a secret hoping for a reconciliation. Now the cover blurb will have to be redone, dropping the claim to Fein's enduring marriage. See—Devon Spurgeon, "Author's Divorce Pits Her 'Rules' Against Reality" in *Wall Street Journal*, p.B1, March 23, 2001.

## LEATHERSTOCKING TALES FROM MITTELEUROPA

by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Thief and swindler Karl May's Westerns have sold 100 million copies of 80 books, making him the bestselling German author of all time. His fans included Hitler and Einstein, and he sparked all the German Wild West clubs. Lufthansa recently laid on non-stop service to Phoenix to haul all the German tourists to May literary sites. May died in 1912 having never visited the Southwest. All his data came from magazine articles on Indian wars which he first found in a prison library. Now the Karl May cult has hit American campuses—symposiums, exhibits, film festivals—possibly because the white men were usually villains, thus passing the p.c. test. Can doctoral dissertations and deconstruction be far behind? See—Cecilie Rohwedder, "Germans Have a Thing About the Wild West, Thanks to Karl May" in *Wall Street Journal*, p.A1, April 4, 2001.

## NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Sumner Redstone expanded his father's drive-in movie chain into Viacom. It now owns CBS, Paramount, MTV, Blockbuster and Nickelodeon. And with the help of that necessary "accomplished collaborator" he's going to tell us all about how he did it. Conveniently, Viacom owns the publisher Simon & Schuster. Which is giving him a coast-to-coast publicity tour, network t.v. appearances and a high-priced "lay-down date." That means the book will be launched everywhere on a single day, which requires a lot of tricky shipping. Sales staff have been exhorted to treat the launch as "A Passion to Keep Our Jobs," a little word play on the book's title *A Passion to Win*. Traditionally, these top exec books were highly suspect and were taken to another publishing house to prove they weren't total vanities. As you can guess, many don't sell very well. See—Laurie P. Cohen, "Simon & Schuster Is More Than Excited About a New Author," in *Wall Street Journal*, p.A1, April 5, 2001.

## BUT DOES HE HAVE A TRUST FUND?

by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Charles Webb was born rich, and his family was contemptuous of his novel *The Graduate* until it became a movie and a huge success. Irritated by the success ethic and American consumerism, Webb gave the money away to charity and moved with his wife to England, drawn by the English eccentric lifestyle. Now after forty years, he has published again—*New Cardiff* with Little, Brown & Co. And he doesn't care at all for the hype connecting him with his famous earlier book. In fact, he had six novels after *The Graduate*, all panned by critics as inferior to his big hit. See—Wade Lambert, "Author of 'The Graduate' (Finally) Publishes Again," in *Wall Street Journal*, p.B1, May 8, 2001.

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# Back Talk — Double Fold or Double Talk

by **Anthony W. Ferguson** (Library Director, University of Hong Kong)



Before commenting on **Nicholson Baker's** new expose on the sins of librarians, I must first confess that I was employed, until last month, by one of the evil university libraries depicted in his book and I was recruited by the central dark-side protagonist featured in *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper*, **Random House**, 2001.

**Baker's** book is a very personalized account in which he is the hero, and most librarians are the villains. **He suggests that we:**

1. Simplified/lie about the wood pulp deterioration hyperbole: We said because the corners of a book or bound newspaper printed on acidic wood pulp paper will break when folded back and forth, within a few years the whole volume will crumble and become dust. The rate of wood pulp paper deterioration is not linear, but is greatly affected by actions under our control: the level and mode of use, temperature, humidity, etc.

2. Disbound newspaper runs and books prior to microfilming and then discarded the remains to speed the microfilming process and to avoid gutter shadow. Ignored filming book cradles that have been around for decades. Failed to reshelve the remains or to find libraries who would put them on shelves for research use. In the process discarded thousands of rare and valuable materials.

3. Participated in film and sell schemes to pay for filming by selling off original newspaper runs to companies specializing in reselling them a page or article at a time, and we replaced them with incomplete and user unfriendly microfilms. These acts, in turn, facilitated the commercialization/privatization of the library's cultural/intellectual heritage preservation function.

4. Failed to comprehend that the intellectual experience of working with the originals is different/superior to working with reformatted reproductions.

5. Put the saving of storage costs ahead of collection development and preservation functions. We fabricated statistics about the rate at which library collections grow in order to make the need to microfilm even more justifiable.

6. Broke moral, if not legal agreements with donors by discarding the materials they gave or purchased for our libraries.

7. Supported/acquiesced to **NEH's** fixation on filming in the name of preservation, instead of providing funds to repair and improve environmental conditions.

8. Minimized/falsified statements about the problems of microfilm: they fade; they make people motion sick when using them; and various kinds of film produce gasses that corrode boxes and cabinets, bubble/buckle/shrink/stick together, are easily scratched, and develop redox blemishes and fungi.

9. Lied about microfilming making money and conservation costing money, when the opposite is true. Microfilming is expensive in the long and short terms if we take into account the value of lost access to information. Conservation, including the boxing of little used materials, on the other hand, costs little.

10. Used resource sharing as a guise to avoid collection development all in the name of preventing the need for new shelving. The goal should be providing content to users, not avoiding the cost of building library buildings.

11. Held on to the double fold (or three fold and tug) technique to determine if a volume should be filmed when this technique has little to do with the reality of how bound volumes are used. Volumes whose corners break off can have their pages turned hundreds of times without ill consequence and structurally unsound books can be boxed and used for long periods of time. Structurally unsound volumes that are used intensively are a rarity and can be selectively replaced/preservation photocopied. To treat everything as if it will crumble tomorrow is dumb and expensive.

12. We did all of this to communicate the "Slow Fires" message: Spend now on microfilming or lose the content forever. If we didn't personally initiate any of these actions, we allowed ourselves to be herded to one degree or another by those who did.

13. Promoted the idea that digitized texts are more useful than the originals because they are fully searchable and because they are more accessible — while ignoring the equally important value of working with originals.

14. Supported digitization projects when we know that the use of OCR (optical character recognition) software to make these volumes fully searchable is a joke.

15. Promoted the scan from film scam to justify the original filming and destruction that had already been done. Since no one wants to scan from film, the original destruction is discredited.

16. Failed to understand the economic and intellectual value of doing nothing: Doing nothing costs little (boxing) or nothing and doesn't result in the destruction of books. Reformatting costs money and results in their destruction. Books and newspapers seemingly doomed to deterioration, don't.

17. Failed to learn from our mistakes: We destroyed texts in the failed microcard experiment, we destroyed texts in the "Slow Fires" movement, and now we are destroying texts in the current rush toward digitization. At least our current Bookkeepers deacidification bandwagon doesn't "appear to" be destroying the originals even though it is questionable that the money needs to be spent for materials that are almost by definition little used.

My general reaction to these accusations is to simply admit that I/we are guilty of many of the acts as charged. But to admit guilt to these acts is a bit like admitting having done all sorts of dumb things while a teenager: Yes,

we put the band teacher's VW bug on top of the gymnasium in 1959; but no, we have not done it lately.

Yet, I don't want to minimize the seriousness of what has been done in the name of library preservation: I/we did hype the wood pulp movement including making the double fold test part of the library culture, supported the disbinding/discarding of bound volumes, sold off printed volumes replaced by film, minimized the importance of working with the original formats, been preoccupied with cost savings at the expense of user access, and went after and accepted the money **NEH** was willing to give (although we did get them to at least allow replacement/repair costs as part of the cost share). Most of these acts, however, are past practices. We were confronted with what we accepted as a problem, we did our best, and we made mistakes.

Some of these acts, however, are still current and these deserve additional serious thought and reflection: I am personally left looking for answers to three questions:

**1. Should we continue to seek/take NEH reformatting money?**

**2. Should we give deacidification any time or attention?**

**3. Should digitization efforts be instead of, or in addition to, providing access to printed materials?**

My answers are no, no, and a fudged no. No, we shouldn't continue to spend anyone's money on reformatting materials unless there is truly no other alternative including inexpensive protective enclosures for all but the rare volume that is at the corn flakes stage. At Columbia we put away the preservation microfilm vacuum approach at least 15 years ago — and many would dispute if we ever really used it (well, maybe it was used for 30 or 40 feet of books).

I have always thought it was curious how reformatting could only be used for books no one was interested in: books for which there were no other editions including reprints available, too few copies had been printed in the first place to permit purchase on the OP market, and preservation photocopying couldn't be justified on the basis of expected use. Books that passed each of these tests could be filmed. Saying no to **NEH** money, however, is easy for me since I am now in Hong Kong and can't take the money.

No, we shouldn't give systematic deacidification any time or attention. This is a tough decision since one of my last acts at **Columbia** was to allocate \$25,000 annually to employ the Bookkeepers approach for new books coming from countries not printing on acid free papers. Deacidification is proactive, but I think the money spent on it would be better spent on my next fudged no.

Should digital efforts be instead of, or in addition to the continued purchase of printed materials? Having spent the last five years as

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